



# Capitol Notes

**Mike Armstrong**

State Representative • 12<sup>th</sup> District



June 2001

Dear friends,

As I write this, the governor has announced that he will call the Legislature back for a third special session on July 16. That's after a 105-day regular session, a 30-day special session he called, and part of a second special session. It frustrates me, because I came to Olympia confident that we could get our work done during the regular session. I know other citizens are frustrated too.

The operating budget is one of the things that has kept us in session so long. It pays for the day-to-day operations of government, and at nearly \$23 billion, it's by far the biggest of the budgets we must pass before adjourning.

The proposal that received legislative approval was written by the Senate Democrats. The problem is, it spends hundreds of millions of dollars more than the state expects to collect in revenue. That's like taking a vacation and having expensive dinners without first setting aside money in the household budget. The vacation and dinners can be paid for with a credit card, but who pays the credit card bill when it's due?

When I met my wife, Mary, I had a "credit card mentality." It did not take her long to convince me that you don't spend money you do not have. I think that's pretty straightforward.

Some legislators think you and I should pay for their overspending, even if that means a tax increase down the road. However, I refuse to vote for a "credit card" operating budget that can't be sustained without raising taxes.

## Moving Ahead on Transportation Improvements

The governor wants the upcoming third special session to concentrate only on our state's transportation needs — a debate that has taken plenty of time already. The focus has been on the Puget Sound area, but as a member of the House Transportation Committee, I am making sure the priorities of North Central Washington also are represented at the discussion table.

As a child growing up in Wenatchee, I remember how the store shelves seemed a little less stocked during the winter, when it was more difficult for trucks to get through the mountain passes. We need to keep our apples moving through the passes and through the congested Interstate 5 corridor to the shipping lanes. At the same time, we must make sure our roads allow people and other products to move safely and efficiently from one point to another within our region — whether it's to go fishing at the lake or deliver the supplies our businesses need to fill orders.

Some legislators want to raise taxes to generate many billions of dollars for new road projects. That would include raising the gas tax by several cents per gallon, on top of the already high prices we are paying at the pump. In all, their proposals would increase taxes for the average family by \$200 to \$300 a year.

## Reforms Will Get Washington 'More Miles Per Dollar'

Raising taxes is a convenient answer, but it would ignore what most folks in North Central Washington have been saying with their votes on citizen initiatives: "Don't ask us to pay more until government changes the way it does business." First and foremost, we should make sure that we are getting our money's worth for each of the dollars we already spend on transportation.

Our willingness to remain in session, instead of accept the Democrats' scheme and go home, is starting to pay off. One of the four transportation reforms we demanded has become law already (it would cut the amount of bureaucratic red tape that delays the start of road construction projects). And the governor now is talking publicly about supporting our other efficiencies. We believe these steps together could free up as much as \$4 billion from highway projects over the next decade. That's real money which could be used on other vital road work.

# Supporting Agriculture and Health Care

Lawmakers passed legislation this session that is good for business and families in our region. We passed an agriculture tax relief package to help struggling farmers. We approved a bill creating two programs designed to promote the marketing of Washington’s agricultural products. And we pushed through the most important changes to Washington’s water law in decades. I am particularly pleased that my proposal to protect water rights is part of that new law.

We still need to do something about lowering the cost of prescription drugs and improving seniors’ access to them. We need to do something about the low wages of the people who take care of our loved ones in long-term care facilities – people who have enormous responsibility but are paid little more than fast-food restaurant employees. Republicans pushed for those changes this session but ran into a Democrat roadblock.

All of this is aimed at preserving the quality of life we enjoy in Washington, and especially this part of the state. Mary and I grew up here in the Wenatchee Valley, and made the decision to stay. We want the same quality of life to be available for our three children – and we hope, someday, our grandchildren – should they decide to settle here.

I am hopeful that a third special session will take place only if a transportation funding package is ready for a vote – so we can complete our work quickly and I can get back home to my family. But until then, I promise you that I will continue doing everything possible to make government live within its means, while improving the services you need and deserve.

Thank you for the honor of representing you.

Sincerely,



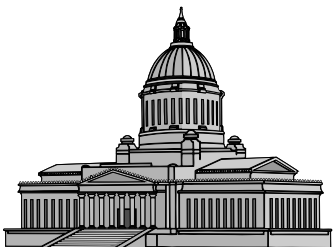
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